DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 136 366 EA 009 277

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TITLE How to Make Better Use of Department Chairmen.
PUB DATE 18 Jan 77
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (61st, New Orleans, Louisiana, January 14-19, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Coordinators; *Department Directors (School); *Departments; Intellectual Disciplines; *Leadership Responsibility; *Occupational Information; Principals; Scheduling; Secondary Education; Staff Meetings; *Staff Utilization; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

Coordinators, as described in this speech, refer to persons called department chairmen, chairpersons, heads, or leaders. The history of the use of coordinators and the responsibilities assigned to them by principals are discussed. The major emphasis of the paper is placed on the considerations necessary for the successful use of coordinators in the secondary school. These include regularly scheduled meetings with open agendas during regular class time, encouragement of interdepartment cooperation, and allotment of enough time for the coordinators to complete the jobs asked of them. (Author/MLF)

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"HOW TO MAKE BETTER USE OF DEPARTMENT CHAIRMEN"

EA 009 277

Presented to members of
National Association of Secondary
School Principals at
New Orleans, Louisiana
January 18, 1977

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Good morning. It is a pleasure to be able to speak this morning to the members of the National Association of Secondary School Principals on the topic of "How to Make Better Use of Department Chairmen." Perhaps some people might request that we change the topic to "How to Make Better Use of Department Chairpersons" in light of Title IX, but I hope that we don't get into that type of discussion today.

Further, in an attempt to present this topic in a more meaningful manner, I plan to include the terms, department chairmen, department chairpersons, department heads and department leaders, under one title -- coordinator. This appears to be appropriate and I envision the person really as a coordinator of a department in the school.

I also wish to present this topic under three specific headings:[1]

1. I will illustrate the history of the use of coordinators as we might see them from various points of view as well as some problems that have arisen due to a lack of acceptance or understanding of the need for this position.

2. I would like to give some general considerations for the successful use of coordinators.

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1. How to Make Better Use of Department Chairmen

3. I would like to list some responsibilities as I see them assigned to the coordinators by the principal.

When we look at the history of the use of coordinators, it is relatively easy to understand why this topic has been selected for discussion at our national convention.[2]

All of us expect that a secordary school will have department coordinators at least in the major academic teaching fields. Recently, also, many of us have been challenged in our expectations by the person serving in this capacity due either to the regulations of the state and local associations or the various labor acts throughout the nation which now relate to these positions. In the discussions today I will relate primarily to the state of Pennsylvania in this category but I am aware that many other states have the same particular type of problems for the various interpretations of labor acts as they affect this position. When we are challenged by the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board most coordinators become the first level of management and as such these people are not permitted to be a part of the bargaining unit. I give you one particular example. In one of our local schools in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, the coordinators are not in the bargaining unit and when the teachers went out on strike, coordinators were obliged to go into the school and teach.

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2. History of the Use of Coordinators

While the other students remained out of school, the coordinators taught the members of the senior class, much to the concern of the teachers on the staff who were still out on strike. Many principals are concerned as to what will happen in the future to the relationship between members of the regular teaching staff and these coordinators since the strike lasted for ten weeks and the regular teaching staff was unemployed while the coordinators were working.

In continuing with the history of the use of the coordinators, I would also like to mention that at least in and throughout the Middle Atlantic States area, all the schools that I have been fortunate enough to have been asked to serve either as a chairman or a member of the evaluating committee <u>have</u> coordinators and they are expected to use them.

Many of these coordinators are outstanding educators who have expressed the feeling that they are frustrated in their attempt to perform adequately in their position. I think this gets to the heart of the difficulty in that the problem exists as to how to use these coordinators most effectively. These people are usually either the best or the most experienced teachers on the staff and a great disappointment for many of them is that there are

no job descriptions at all for these positions. In an attempt to reward them, some of the coordinators are paid extra money, some are given time off, some receive both benefits. Yet, their job descriptions are so vague or non-existent that the people involved are left out on a limb and feel totally frustrated. I would offer as an example one job description for your consideration that I have seen stated in a school district. It goes something like this: "The coordinator should continue to do the work assigned to him by the principal in running his department in the best possible manner." End of quote. This is about as loose as you can make any particular job description. On the other hand, I think as principals this might help us out quite a bit because in no way could we be bound by the coordinators' decisions. The unfortunate coordinators, however, are going to be left high and dry any time a difficulty comes up with their department.

In an attempt to present the best possible setting for the successful use of coordinators I told my coordinators I would be speaking to you at this convention and I asked them to list some of the things I should mention to you for your consideration as they evaluated their positions.

I would hate to tell you all the answers I received but I would like to mention that they were very concerned that there should be some general considerations for the successful use of coordinators.[3]

I would like to share these with you now.

First: There should be a regularly scheduled meeting provided for in their schedule when all the coordinators could meet and discuss the common problems either of individual departments or of the school in general. If you have any control over the master schedule, I would suggest you take a particular period of the week and in the building of this master schedule, block out that period when the meeting is to be held. A very important outcome of these meetings is to provide a copy of the minutes of the meetings to all of the members of the staff. For instance, when our coordinators meet on Tuesday mornings during the first period, my secretary is in attendance. She takes the minutes of the meetings, transcribes them and distributes them not only to the coordinators but to all the members of the staff.

Another concept that I feel is extremely important is that there be an open agenda for the coordinator meetings. In many of the schools that I have visited, the principal sets the meeting times with the coordinators, if they have

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3. General Considerations for Successful Use of Coordinators

meetings at all, and he tells them what he wants them to do and this is usually the end of the meeting. I think it is most important that coordinators are able to submit agenda items or items for discussion at any time and that they are given the same treatment as those presented by the principal. I also feel that the scheduling of the meeting should be made during the time of a regular class period. This holds the meeting to a specific time limit and does not allow the meeting to drag on. The meeting then becomes much more meaningful and productive for all concerned.

I was very impressed when one of our coordinators mentioned the cabinet idea that we exercise in our department meetings was excellent since the coordinators have the opportunity to have a sort of free-wheeling plan and we were able to suggest ideas to other coordinators in our school. These discussions arose because there was success in one department which the coordinator felt could be possibly utilized in other areas successfully. It was also impressive because I had not envisioned this as a cabinet but the coordinators did accept it as such. Another strong point of this cabinet idea was the position mentioned that the principal meets with the various departments in their meetings as an observer and at this time, coordinators are in charge of the meetings and the principal is merely there as an observer

and available if called upon to answer questions or give some sidelights to the discussions that take place. It is important that the department members realize that the principal has given at least partial control of the department to the coordinators and expects these coordinators to interpret the policies and to run their department as has been established through the cabinet meetings of the coordinators.

It is also important to encourage inter-department cooperation. Traditionally, one would usually only see joint proposals from Math and Science or English and Social Studies. I think in the type of situation that I am proposing, a very encouraging part of a presentation occurs when a joint proposal concerning basics in education is presented and developed jointly for an inservice program by such areas as Math and Social Studies or by the Art and Guidance Departments or other non-related areas throughout the school. This builds a fine relationship between coordinators and it also encourages all the members to feel that there is a true staff working relationship and a real team management concept in operation.

We see here also that an important consideration is that there are no long lists of "do's" and "don'ts" for coordinators. I would not want to be as brief as the example I

mentioned earlier nor would I want to go into a list of 30 to 50 things that the department coordinators should do. When a coordinator gets a long list of things that can or cannot be done, these limits become the extent of the position and that is all that you can expect from the coordinator.

Another one of the more important considerations for the successful use of coordinators is that they be permitted to have enough time to complete the jobs they are asked to do. If, for example, we ask them to observe teachers we must give them free time or provide sit-ins for them to cover their classes while they are observing. Sometimes the principal can perform this sit-in duty. This is a novel approach that usually shocks the living daylights out of a lot of people. Needless to say, this should be a pre-arranged sit-in with the coordinator. Although it is novel and you might not be able to afford the luxury, it does once more enforce the coordinator's position and also permits the students to see you as a principal in a classroom possibly even teaching a class, which is very novel indeed.

Another example of permitting coordinators enough time for their jobs might be in preparation of the budget for

their department. I think most of us are aware that coordinators should have some say in the budget for their department and if we are going to encourage them to help with the department budget we can't say - "Here are the department forms and I want them back next week." It is very important that they become aware of certain time limitations such as when to expect to receive the forms and then to permit them to have enough time to work out a realistic budget with their departments. If this is not done properly one can expect either a padding of the budget or complete frustation on the part of all persons concerned and ultimate chaos in putting a budget together.

One of the more important things that I would have you consider is to provide a means for all curricular areas in the school to be represented in these coordinator meetings. I mention this because a few years ago I made the mistake of only using the curricular areas where I needed coordinators at our meetings and I neglected certain areas which might be listed in some schools as minor areas. There was a definite lack of coordination throughout the school when it came time to discuss how some new programs would relate to these minor areas. Since that condition was changed, we have been using meeting time well to meet with all the coordinators and the meetings have been more meaningful and productive.

This is a prime concern and if we are going to have one school and one staff as I mentioned earlier, the real concept of team management dictates that we use all department coordinators in the school in our attempt to provide the best possible system for the enhancement of the educational process. As you can see in part three,[4] I have listed seven specific areas of coordinator responsibility. You could probably list many more or by virtue of your own particular limitations you could list one or two. As I mentioned, the seven major areas of coordinators' responsibility is really a list of personal preferences. Since you may wish to add to or delete from the items on this list I would merely wish to explain some of the reasoning behind my selections.[4a]

I have listed these as I prefer them through my own particular experience and you can see that I feel the curriculum is the most important part of the responsibility of the coordinator. Briefly, I suggest that part (a) under the title Curriculum, is very important when we say that the observation of teachers should be scheduled in an attempt to help them improve their educational performance.

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4. Responsibilities Assigned to the Coordinator by the Principal

4a. Responsibilities Assigned to the Coordinators by the Principal

When the coordinator is aware that the principal feels that the primary reason for observing teachers is to help them to facilitate the educational process rather than to try and catch teachers unprepared or off-guard, the coordinator can become a real change agent for better teaching.

Part "B", dealing with the Budget, is self explanatory. Part "1" under "C" Personnel is one of the more important of the department coordinators' responsibilities since I do not believe that any staff member should be employed in the department or in the school without an interview by the administration as well as the department coordinator. The people who are employed will have to work with this coordinator and therefore it is important that they are aware of who and where they are going to be working and under what type of conditions.

Under Mangement[5] responsibilities I think the important concern would be to establish that the coordinator working in the department should be aware of all the possible needs such as repairs, alterations and improvements in the department area and that these needs are important for the learning process and they should be cared for immediately.

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5. D. Management

It is also important to ascertain that both the receipt of equipment and supplies and the establishment of an effective means of inventory is an important part of the management capabilities of the coordinator. Under administration responsibilities[5] the major assignment for the coordinator would be to assist the guidance department in the placement of students in the department program. This is especially true if an elective program is used in the school where the guidance department might not be completely aware of the need or necessity for placing the students under certain categories.

In summary, I hope that I have been able either to develop some ideas or offer you some thoughts on how to make better use of department coordinators. I suppose that if I had to limit my presentation to a few general statements, I would advise you to select a coordinator who is capable of dealing with all kinds of educational situations; a person who is sincerely interested in education, especially in their own curricular area; a person who is loyal to the school philosophy and one who is always encouraging the members of the department to improve their teaching techniques.

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5. E. Administration

I doubt if many of us have been fortunate enough to acquire the services of a staff of coordinators with these qualities and until we do we will have to strive to develop some way to make better use of coordinators much as we are doing today.

HOW TO MAKE BETTER USE OF DEPARTMENT CHAIRMEN

I. History of the Use of Coordinators

II. General Considerations for Successful Use of Coordinators

III. Responsibilities Assigned to Coordinators by the Principal

I. History of the Use of Coordinators

A. First Level of Management

B. Expectations for Position

C. Vague Job Descriptions

D. Coordinators Interpretations or Expectations of Position

II. General Considerations for Successful Use of Coordinators

A. Regularly Scheduled Meeting provided in Schedule.

1. Minutes to all Staff Members

B. Open Agenda

C. Cabinet Idea

D. Interpretation of School Policy

E. Inter-department cooperation (joint proposals)

F. No long listing

G. Allow time for work

H. Include all curricular areas of the school in coordinator meetings

III. Responsibilities Assigned to the Coordinators by the Principal

A. Curriculum

1. Observation of teachers for the improvement of instruction
2. Establish department goals and objectives
3. Encourage department innovations
4. Updating courses of study
5. Develop a list of resources for school and department use

B. Budget

1. Prepare, present and implement a realistic budget for the department

C. Personnel

1. Assist in the interview of new department members
2. Recommend teaching assignments to ensure equality of work
3. Provide guidelines for the placement of student teachers, educational aides
4. Encourage staff participation in professional education activities

D. MANAGEMENT

1. SUBMIT REQUESTS FOR REPAIRS, ALTERATIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT AREA
2. VERIFY THE RECEIPT OF EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES
3. ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE MEANS OF INVENTORY
4. AID SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS
5. SUBMIT REPORTS AND KEEP ACCURATE RECORDS OF DEPARTMENT MEETINGS

E. ADMINISTRATION

1. ASSISTS THE GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT IN THE PLACEMENT OF STUDENTS IN DEPARTMENT PROGRAMS
2. MEET WITH PARENTS TO DISCUSS THE DEPARTMENT PROGRAM
3. COORDINATE THE FUNCTION OF THE DEPARTMENT WITH OTHER SCHOOL OPERATIONS
4. MAINTAIN RECORDS AND SUBMIT PERIODIC AND SPECIAL REPORTS

F. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

1. ENCOURAGE STAFF MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS
2. PARTICIPATE IN GROUP ACTIVITIES SUCH AS WORKSHC INSERVICE PROGRAMS, SEMINARS, ETC.

G. District Obligations

1. Attend and participate in district coordinators' meetings and activities
2. Aid in the development of the course of study guide for the district